

Amendments to the Specification

Please replace the paragraph beginning at page 17, line 21, with the following amended paragraph.

The present invention further includes replication competent polynucleotides encoding an HCV polyprotein having similarity with the amino acid sequence of SEQ ID NO:2, SEQ ID NO:4 (in the case of a full length polyprotein), or a portion thereof (in the case of an HCV polyprotein encoding, for instance, NS3, NS4A, NS4B, NS5A, and NS5B, and not encoding core, E1, E2, P7, and NS2). The similarity is referred to as structural similarity and is generally determined by aligning the residues of the two amino acid sequences (i.e., a candidate amino acid sequence and the amino acid sequence of SEQ ID NO:2, SEQ ID NO:4, or a portion thereof) to optimize the number of identical amino acids along the lengths of their sequences; gaps in either or both sequences are permitted in making the alignment in order to optimize the number of identical amino acids, although the amino acids in each sequence must nonetheless remain in their proper order. A candidate amino acid sequence is the amino acid sequence being compared to an amino acid sequence present in SEQ ID NO:2, SEQ ID NO:4, or a portion thereof. A candidate amino acid sequence can be isolated from a cell infected with a hepatitis C virus, or can be produced using recombinant techniques, or chemically or enzymatically synthesized. Preferably, two amino acid sequences are compared using the Blastp program of the BLAST 2 search algorithm, as described by Tatusova, et al. (*FEMS Microbiol Lett* 1999, 174:247-250), and available at <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/gorf/bl2.html> through the World Wide Web at the internet site maintained by the National Center for Biotechnology Information, National Institutes of Health. Preferably, the default values for all BLAST 2 search parameters are used, including matrix = BLOSUM62; open gap penalty = 11, extension gap penalty = 1, gap x_dropoff = 50, expect = 10, wordsize = 3, and optionally, filter on. In the comparison of two amino acid sequences using the BLAST search algorithm, structural similarity is referred to as "identities." An HCV polyprotein may include an amino acid sequence having a structural similarity with SEQ ID NO:2, SEQ ID NO:4, or a portion thereof, of at least about 90 %, for

example 91%, 92%, 93% identity, and so on to 100 % identity. A replication competent polynucleotide having a 5' NTR of SEQ ID NO:9, a 3' NTR of SEQ ID NO:8, and HCV polyprotein with structural similarity with SEQ ID NO:2, SEQ ID NO:4, or a portion thereof, is replication competent in a cell derived from a human hepatoma such as Huh-7 and Huh-7.5. An HCV polyprotein having structural similarity with the amino acid sequence of SEQ ID NO:2, SEQ ID NO:4, or a portion thereof, includes the S2204I adaptive mutation and one or more of the adaptive mutations described herein. Such an HCV polyprotein may optionally include other adaptive mutations.

Please replace the paragraph beginning at page 19, line 1, with the following amended paragraph.

The present invention includes polynucleotides encoding an amino acid sequence having similarity to an HCV polyprotein. The similarity is referred to as structural similarity and is determined by aligning the residues of two polynucleotides (e.g., the nucleotide sequence of the candidate coding region and nucleotides 342 - 9377 of SEQ ID NO:1 or nucleotides 342 - 9377 of SEQ ID NO:3) to optimize the number of identical nucleotides along the lengths of their sequences; gaps in either or both sequences are permitted in making the alignment in order to optimize the number of shared nucleotides, although the nucleotides in each sequence must nonetheless remain in their proper order. A candidate coding region is the coding region being compared to a coding region present in SEQ ID NO:1 (e.g., nucleotides 342 - 9377 of SEQ ID NO:1). A candidate nucleotide sequence can be isolated from a cell, or can be produced using recombinant techniques, or chemically or enzymatically synthesized. Preferably, two nucleotide sequences are compared using the Blastn program of the BLAST 2 search algorithm, as described by Tatusova, et al. (*FEMS Microbiol Lett* 1999, 174:247-250), and available at <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/gorf/bl2.html> through the World Wide Web at the internet site maintained by the National Center for Biotechnology Information, National Institutes of Health. Preferably, the default values for all BLAST 2 search parameters are used, including reward for

Amendment and Response

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match = 1, penalty for mismatch = -2, open gap penalty = 5, extension gap penalty = 2, gap x_dropoff = 50, expect = 10, wordsize = 11, and optionally, filter on. In the comparison of two nucleotide sequences using the BLAST search algorithm, structural similarity is referred to as "identities."